

CLAIMS

1. Apparatus (10,110,210) for obtaining personal information related to a target person, comprising:

5 an image acquisition device (12,22,32,112,122,132,212) for capturing an image of a target person;

10 a database of stored image data items (15,25,35,115,125,135) each relating to one of a plurality of candidate persons, each image data item being associated with stored personal data (16,26,36,116,126,136) relating to the respective candidate person;

15 a search engine (18,28,38,253) for matching the captured image of the target person to a candidate person image data item and retrieving the personal data relating thereto;

an output device (14,24,34,114,124,134) for presenting, to a user, the personal data relating to the target person; and

20 control means (17,27,37,117,127,137), operable by each candidate person, to control third party access to the stored personal data (16,26,36,116,126,136) relating to the candidate person.

25 2. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the database is a distributed database, candidate persons each having a portable device (11,21,31) for storing their own image data items (15,25,35) and personal data (16,26,36) which may be accessed by the search engine using a wireless communication channel (40,41).

30 3. The apparatus of claim 2 in which the control means (17,27,37) comprises an access control function provided on each portable device (11,21,31).

4. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the database includes a central repository (105,205) accessible to a plurality of remote portable devices

(111,121,131,211,221,231) using a wireless communication channel (140,141,142,240,241,242).

5. The apparatus of claim 4 in which the control means is a distributed control means (117,127,137), candidate persons each having a device (111,121,131) for storing their own image data items (115,125,135) and personal data (116,126,136) onto the database and determining third party access rights thereto.

10 6. A portable electronic device comprising the image acquisition device (12,112,212), output device (14,24,34,114,124,134) and control means (17,27,37,117,127,137) of claim 1 integrated into said portable electronic device (11,21,31,111,121,131).

15 7. The apparatus of claim 6 in which the portable electronic device is any of a personal digital assistant, personal computer or mobile telephony device.

20 8. The apparatus of claim 6 or claim 7 in which the portable electronic device further includes communication means (13,23,33,113,123,133) for communication with a remotely located database (25,26,35,36,105,205) and the search engine (253).

25 9. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the output device is a display device (14,24,34,114,124,134) for displaying the personal data relating to the target person.

30 10. A portable device (11,21,31,111,121,131,211,221,231) for obtaining personal information related to a target person, comprising:
an image acquisition device (12,22,32,112,122,132,212) for capturing an image of a target person;

means (13,23,33,113,123,133) for accessing a remote database of stored image data items (15,25,35,115,125,135) each of relating to one of a plurality of candidate persons, each image data item being associated with personal data (16,26,36,116,126,136) relating to the respective candidate person;

means for retrieving the personal data relating to a candidate person for which the captured image data of the target person matches the stored image data item of the candidate person;

an output device (14,24,34,114,124,134) for presenting, to a user, the retrieved personal data relating to the target person; and

control means (17,27,37,117,127,137) to control third party access to the database of personal data relating to a candidate person.

11. The portable device of claim 10 in which the means for accessing and the means for retrieving include a wireless communication device.

12. A personal digital assistant, personal computer or mobile telephony device having integrated therein the portable device of claim 10.

13. The portable device of claim 11 in which the wireless communication device is adapted to communicate with a plurality of corresponding devices, the corresponding devices together forming the remote database.

14. A system for providing personal information related to a target person, comprising:

a database of stored image data items (15,25,35,115,125,135) each relating to one of a plurality of candidate persons, each image data item being associated with personal data (16,26,36,116,126,136) relating to the respective candidate person;

means for receiving, from a remote image acquisition device, a captured image of a target person;

a search engine (18,28,38,253) for matching the captured image of the target person to a candidate person image data item and retrieving the personal data relating thereto;

means for transmitting, to a remote output device (14,24,34,114,124,134), the personal data relating to the target person; and control means (17,27,37,117,127,137), operable by each candidate person, to control third party access to the stored personal data relating to the candidate person.

10 15. A method of obtaining information related to a target person, comprising the steps of:

capturing an image of a target person;

15 supplying image data from the captured image to a database of stored image data items (15,25,35,115,125,135) each relating to one of a plurality of candidate persons, each image data item being associated with personal data (16,26,36,116,126,136) relating to the respective candidate person;

searching the database to match the captured image of the target person with a candidate person image data item and retrieving the personal data relating thereto;

20 outputting the personal data relating to the target person; and

maintaining the database by enabling control, by each candidate person, of third party access to the personal data relating to that candidate person.

25 16. A method according to claim 15 and further comprising of the step of attaching a digital signature to said supplied image data.

30 17. A method according to claim 16 wherein the step of outputting the personal data will not occur unless the attached digital signature is established to be valid and authentic.

18. A method according to claim 15 wherein said step of outputting personal data involves outputting encrypted personal data.

19. A computer program product, comprising a computer readable medium having thereon computer program code means adapted, when said program is loaded onto a computing apparatus, to make the computing apparatus form the device of any one of claims 10 to 13.

10 20. A computer program, distributable by electronic data transmission, comprising computer program code means adapted, when said program is loaded onto a computing apparatus, to make the computing apparatus form the device of any one of claims 10 to 13.